



2006 Fishing Outlook

Compiled by Pat Headrick

Every two years *North Dakota OUTDOORS* provides a detailed statewide fishing outlook. Essentially, we ask district fisheries supervisors and biologists to predict future weather, fishing pressure, harvest and other factors and provide their best guesses of what to expect. Usually, because of their expertise and experience – and barring some cataclysmic event – they hit pretty close to the mark.

North Dakota is divided into six fisheries management districts, each headed by a district fisheries supervisor, and complemented by a number of district biologists and/or fisheries technicians. Forecasts

from district supervisors and biologists follow.

To learn more about these waters, including such details as directions from the nearest town, fish species available, and facilities such as boat ramps, see the 2006 North Dakota Fishing Waters guide that begins on page 34 of this issue. Fishing waters are also listed in the 2006-2008 North Dakota Fishing Guide, something anglers are reminded to thoroughly review for regulations pertaining to daily and possession limits, season dates and other important information.



SOUTHEASTERN DISTRICT

Gene Van Eeckhout, district fisheries supervisor, and B.J. Kratz, district fisheries biologist, both Jamestown.

As of mid-January, winterkill potential was minimal and conditions looked good. Most lakes had less ice than normal. General water conditions in the southeast are not as favorable as they were the past couple of years. An exception is the extreme southeastern corner of the state where there is good moisture east of a line roughly from Ellendale to Casselton.

NORTHERN PIKE

The number of lakes with good to excellent pike populations has declined somewhat in the past two years, reflective of deteriorating water conditions, harvest mortality, and loss of rearing habitat. Nevertheless, pike are relatively abundant in many lakes. Good opportunities exist to catch larger fish, and numbers of average size fish in the southeast. The number of small fish is down over previous years, mainly due to decreasing water levels and resulting loss of rearing habitat.

Barnes Lake (Stutsman County) – Pike numbers down from previous high. Large pike are present.

Clark Lake (Stutsman County) – Good numbers of 4-pound pike.

Coldwater Lake (McIntosh County) – Pike numbers down from previous high. Average pike with some larger fish present. Consistent producer.

Kalmbach Lake (LaMoure County) – Pike numbers down from previous high, but still consistent numbers of 4-pound pike. Early season favorite.

Kulm-Edgeley (LaMoure County) – Fair numbers of pike. Average size is 7 pounds.

Mallard Marsh (Stutsman County) – Pike numbers down from previous high. Many different sizes with some larger fish present. Poor summer access.

Pipestem Reservoir (Stutsman County) – Good numbers of pike. Mixed sizes with trophy fish (more than 15 pounds) caught every year.

Tewaukon Lake (Sargent County) – Located on Tewaukon National Wildlife Refuge. Tewaukon should continue to provide good pike fishing. Anglers may not take northern pike of less than 24 inches.

WALLEYE

There are numerous walleye fishing waters throughout the southeast. Because of walleye popularity, many lakes are stocked annually and are very productive, with minimal competition for food. Fishing pressure on these waters is usually light as anglers habitually head toward more popular larger fisheries.

Overall, adult walleye numbers are down in many area lakes, again reflective of deteriorating water conditions and angler harvest. However, hatchery reared walleye fingerlings stocked in spring 2005 appear to have produced a super year-class in some district lakes. If these fish find sufficient forage and continue to grow, there could be some excellent fishing for 14-16 inch walleye starting in 2007 or 2008.

Lake Ashtabula (Barnes County) – Overall, adult walleye numbers are down. Trophy-size fish are present and caught every year, particularly in autumn. A 14-inch minimum length limit applies.

Fly-fishing for trout on the Turtle River in eastern North Dakota.

Barnes Lake (Stutsman County) – Excellent numbers of walleye of various sizes. Nice average size (3 pounds) and a good early-summer producer.

Coldwater Lake (McIntosh County) – Good numbers of walleye. Nice average size. In previous years has produced many 5-pound-plus fish.

Jamestown Reservoir (Stutsman County) – Number of legal (greater than 14 inches) fish down. High numbers of small- to medium-sized fish make for higher catch rates. Anglers should practice catch-and-release as these fish represent the future.

Mallard Marsh (Stutsman County) – Excellent walleye numbers. Average size of 2 1/2 pounds. Some larger fish present. Poor summer access.

Pipestem Reservoir – Overall, walleye numbers are down.

Sheyenne River – At times good for walleye below lowhead dams.

Spiritwood Lake (Stutsman County) – Traditional walleye producer. Very good numbers of medium-sized fish. Good numbers of large fish, too.

CATFISH

Red River – Catfishing is excellent over the length of the river. The catfish population in the southern part of the river (the Red flows south to north) is comprised of more, but smaller fish than the northern stretch. Red River (and Bois de Sioux) anglers may take daily no more than one channel catfish longer than 24 inches.

Sheyenne River – Catfishing is excellent at times below dams at Lisbon and Fort Ransom.

PANFISH (Yellow Perch, Crappie, Bluegill)

Panfish populations in the east are cyclic. As a result, fishing opportunities and success are generally up and down. Perch populations continue to decline from record abundance in the late 1990s. However, new perch lakes still pop up on an annual basis. Anglers are encouraged to contact local bait shops regarding perch fishing, particularly in the winter. Numerous opportunities exist for bluegill and crappie throughout southeastern North Dakota. These species are often overlooked by anglers targeting yellow perch during winter. Conversely, the opposite holds true during summer when interest in yellow perch wanes.

Daily and possession limits for perch, crappie, and bluegill have been lowered to 20 and 80 with the exception of Kraft Slough

and Pipestem Reservoir, where new experimental limits have been put in place. At Kraft Slough, which will be open to winter fishing only, the daily yellow perch limit is 10, with a possession limit of 20 fish. At Pipestem, the daily crappie limit is 10, with a possession limit of 20 fish.

Lake Ashtabula (Barnes County) – The perch population bottomed out several years ago and recovery has been slow.

Brewer Lake (Cass County) – Bluegill have recovered from a spring fish kill in 2002 and should be able to handle some fishing pressure. Good numbers of small bluegill, with some larger fish present. Occasional larger crappie.

Coldwater Lake (McIntosh County) – Lots of small perch.

Dead Colt Creek (Ransom County) – Historically, this lake has produced good crappie catches. Excellent numbers of small- to medium-sized bluegill. The lake should provide some excellent crappie and bluegill fishing at times, depending on the time of year. Note: Dead Colt Creek contains Eurasian water milfoil, an invasive aquatic plant. Anglers are urged to take extra precautions in removing all aquatic vegetation from watercraft to prevent spreading to other waters.

Jamestown Reservoir (Stutsman County) – Historically, a good crappie fishery. Large crappie are still in the lake, but not overly abundant. Recent catches were lower than previous years. Large fish comprise the majority of the population.

Kraft Slough (Sargent County) – Lots of yellow perch that have reproduced for at least two years. The lake has lots of forage, and with good growth, prospects look good for winter 2006-07.

Lake LaMoure (LaMoure County) – Has shown ability to produce some great catches, though fish numbers are lower than previous years. Some nice fish present. Bad weather and flooding during last year's survey contributed to a poor sample. Consequently, predictions for panfish are difficult to make.

Pipestem Reservoir (Stutsman County) – Historically, a great crappie fishery. Population density appears to be declining after several winters of intense harvest and recent catches have been lower than previous years. Larger crappie dominate.

Spiritwood Lake (Stutsman County) – Yellow perch abundant, although average size is on the small side.

BASS (Largemouth, Smallmouth)

Some excellent bass fishing in the south-east. Bass fishing is not as popular among anglers in North Dakota as it is in other states. These species' fervor for artificial lures makes them vulnerable to overharvest, particularly larger fish. Generally, fisheries that are consistent producers of large fish are those where catch-and-release is the rule.

Brewer Lake (Cass County) – Typically holds a good to excellent bass population.

Dead Colt Creek (Ransom County) – An excellent largemouth bass population. Because the lake receives intense fishing pressure at times, catch-and-release of larger fish is encouraged. Note: The lake contains Eurasian water milfoil, an invasive aquatic plant. Anglers are urged to take extra precautions in removing all aquatic vegetation from watercraft to prevent spreading to other waters.

Heinrich-Martin (LaMoure County) – Good numbers of largemouth bass. Fish are on the small size, but big fish are present.

Spiritwood Lake (Stutsman County) – An excellent smallmouth bass fishery containing many sizes with large fish present. The number of larger smallmouth bass is declining as older fish are harvested. Still a good place to catch a big smallie. Catch-and-release is encouraged.

Sheyenne River (stretch between Fort Ransom and Lisbon) (Ransom County) – A relatively unused fishery. Provides good habitat for smallmouth bass. Reports of good success from anglers who have tried it.

TROUT

Blumhardt Lake (McIntosh County) – Stocked annually with rainbows.

Moon Lake (Barnes County) – This lake is back in trout management for the first time in many years, which will continue as long as water quality allows.

Mooreton Pond (Richland County) – Catchable-size trout are stocked annually.

Panfish daily and possession limits have been changed statewide for perch, crappie, white bass and bluegill. The daily limit is now 20 and possession limit is 80, except for Kraft Slough, Sargent County; Pipestem Reservoir, Stutsman County; and Odland Dam, Golden Valley County; where lower limits apply.

NORTHWESTERN DISTRICT

Fred Ryckman, district fisheries supervisor, Williston.

Fish populations at many northwestern district waters are still rebounding from the winter of 2003-04 when about half the district waters experienced fish kills, many of which were considered significant. By contrast, no winterkill was anticipated in 2006.

Water levels in the northwest are generally satisfactory, although a few lakes remain several feet below full pool.



White bass are one of four species of panfish that fall under new daily and possession limit regulations in 2006.

CHRIS GRONDAHL



NORTHERN PIKE

Blacktail Dam (Williams County) – Holds a strong population of pike, with fish of all sizes, some over 20 pounds.

Lake Darling (Renville County) – Low pike numbers, but some are over 20 pounds.

Missouri River System – There has been only minimal improvement in Lake Sakakawea's extremely low water levels over the past several years, which continues to limit pike fishing opportunities. Much of Sakakawea's headwaters area – the lower portion of the Little Muddy River and other backwaters in the Williston area – have all but dried up. Best reports from pike anglers are now from areas much farther downstream.

Powers Lake (Burke County) – Fair numbers of northern pike, with mostly 3- to 5-pound fish, although some are well over 10 pounds. Fishing pressure and harvest are relatively light.

Skjermo Lake (Divide County) – This small lake contains a surprisingly good population of pike, most are 2-4 pounds, but a few are more than 10 pounds.

Smishek Lake (Burke County) – Fair numbers of pike, a few weighing more than 20 pounds.

WALLEYE

Blacktail Dam (Williams County) – Contains fair numbers of walleye, with several year-classes present and some exceeding 20 inches.

Lake Darling (Renville County) – Some big walleye, but fewer small fish. Anglers are encouraged to be conservative in harvesting walleye until the population improves.

McGregor Dam (Williams County) – Contains fair numbers of walleye, with several year-classes present and some fish exceeding 6 pounds.

Missouri River System – As with northern pike, Sakakawea's low water levels have greatly reduced access and fishing success. Although there has been basically no open water success for walleye in Sakakawea upstream of White Earth Bay, winter anglers

have had some luck in the area from Hofflund Flats to Little Beaver Bay. Walleye and sauger numbers and fishing success are highly variable in the Williston Reach upstream of Lake Sakakawea, but anglers at times experience very good to excellent catches, especially during winter and during open water periods when water clarity is at least fairly good.

Northgate Dam (Burke County) – Despite a significant loss of walleye during the winter of 2003-04, Northgate still holds a fairly strong population, with several year-classes.

Smishek Lake (Burke County) – Contains fair numbers of walleye, with some exceeding 8 pounds.

CATFISH

Little Missouri River – Good catfishing at times upstream to Medora. Success highly depends on flows; high flows generally attract greater numbers of catfish farther upstream in the river.

Lake Sakakawea – Good numbers of cats throughout the reservoir, but best numbers and fishing success in the upper end.

Upper Lake Sakakawea, Missouri River (above the reservoir) and Yellowstone River – A strong catfish population, with some fish exceeding 10 pounds. This is where anglers will find the best chance to catch a big cat in the Missouri River System. Anglers who target the area from Williston to the Missouri River and Yellowstone River confluence are generally quite successful during the open water season, and fair numbers of catfish are caught through the ice.

PANFISH (Yellow Perch, Crappie, Bluegill)

Blacktail Dam (Williams County) – Fair numbers of perch and bluegill. Mostly smaller fish, although some perch and bluegill over 1 pound.

Lake Darling (Renville County) – The perch population is greatly reduced, but some big fish may still be found.

Epping-Springbrook Dam (Williams County) – Fair numbers of perch, with some keeper fish.

Kota-Ray Dam (Williams County) – Fair populations of perch and bluegill, although most are smaller.

Leland Dam (McKenzie County) – Supports a good bluegill population, although most fish are smaller. Because Leland is a small reservoir, catch-and-release is encouraged.

McGregor Dam (Williams County) – Good numbers of mostly smaller perch.

Northgate Dam (Burke County) – Strong bluegill population with some fish exceeding 1 pound. Catch-and-release of larger fish is encouraged. Fair numbers of larger black crappies are also present; several Whopper crappie were reported from this water in 2005. As with walleye, many bluegill and crappie were lost to winterkill in 2003-2004.

Sather Dam (McKenzie County) – Supports a good bluegill population, although most are smaller fish.

Trenton Lake (Williams County) – This Missouri River backwater contains good numbers of crappie, but most are less than 9 inches.

BASS (Largemouth, Smallmouth)

Baukol-Noonan Dam (Divide County) – Good numbers of largemouth, although most are smaller. The first Catch-and-Release Club qualifier largemouth from this water was reported in 2005.

Blacktail Dam (Williams County) – Contains fair numbers of smallmouth bass, although most are smaller.

Kota-Ray Dam (Williams County) – Contains good populations of both largemouth and smallmouth bass, with some larger fish of both species.

Leland Dam (McKenzie County) – Holds a good largemouth bass population, although most fish are smaller.

Sather Dam (McKenzie County) – Holds a good largemouth bass population, although most fish are smaller.

TROUT

Baukol-Noonan Wildlife Management Area waters (Divide County) – The two waters on this WMA contain fair populations of rainbow trout. These waters are generally lightly fished and could support more angling activity.

Iverson Dam (Williams County) – Contains a fair trout population, although most are less than 14 inches.

Kettle Lake (Williams County) – Fair numbers of rainbows with some larger fish. This lake is closed to winter fishing. Catch-and-release is encouraged.

Kota-Ray Dam (Williams County) – Good numbers of trout, but mostly smaller fish. Relatively high angler use and harvest. Catch-and-release is encouraged.

Leland Dam (McKenzie County) – Contains a fair trout population, although most are less than 14 inches.

McGregor Dam (Williams County) – Contains a fair trout population, with some fish of more than 18 inches.

Northgate Dam (Burke County) – Good rainbow trout population, but fewer large fish compared to past years.

Sather Dam (McKenzie County) – Contains a fair trout population, although most are less than 14 inches.



North Dakota is dotted with a number of waters that hold rainbow trout.

CRAIG BHRLE

NORTH CENTRAL DISTRICT

Jeff Hendrickson, district fisheries supervisor, and Dave Fryda, fisheries biologist, both Riverdale.

The Missouri River System is experiencing its sixth consecutive year of lower than normal runoff. As a result, water levels remain at or near all-time lows, which has severely restricted access. While water levels have also affected the fisheries, prospects for walleye, smallmouth bass and pike fishing are still mostly positive. Gizzard shad have helped improve forage abundance in the Missouri River and Lake Oahe below Garrison Dam. Walleye and pike fishing should be good on Lake Sakakawea, despite lower water levels.

Water conditions remain good throughout the north central district and a mild winter raises little concern about significant winterkill. This is welcome news as many fisheries within the district are still recovering from winterkill in 2004.



CHRIS GRONDAHL

From big waters to small waters, from northern pike to crappie, the fishing opportunities in North Dakota are diverse.

NORTHERN PIKE

This district still contains many good pike fishing opportunities. However, some formerly good pike waters, including Brush Lake, Crooked Lake and Rice Lake (Ward County), are still recovering from severe winterkill in 2004.

While most district lakes provide good angling for primarily smaller- to medium-sized pike, some large pike are usually present.

Buffalo Lodge Lake (McHenry County) – Decent pike numbers.

North Carlson Lake (Ward County) – Good numbers of pike up to 5 pounds.

South Carlson Lake (Ward County) – Good pike angling in recent years.

Coal Mine Lake (Sheridan County) – Decent pike population, with some larger fish available.

Cottonwood Lake (McHenry County) – Fair pike numbers.

Long Lake (McLean County) – Abundant pike.

Lake Metigoshe (Bottineau County) – Good northern pike fishing.

Missouri River System – Most of the Missouri River System has good pike populations and the potential for anglers to catch large fish. Pike from the banner 1994 year-class get larger every year and a lot of them should now be in the 20-pound-plus range. Pike fishing is typically best in upper Sakakawea, however, during the current low water period, fishing is better down reservoir.

Strawberry Lake (McLean County) – Good pike population.

WALLEYE

Traditional north central district walleye fisheries such as Lake Audubon and Garrison Diversion Unit lakes will continue to provide good fishing. In addition, several smaller, less popular lakes contain quality walleye populations.

Lake Audubon (McLean County) – Good numbers of quality-sized fish. In addition, a couple of recent strong year-classes mean anglers will have many 14- to 16-inch fish available over the next couple seasons.

Lake Brekken (McLean County) – Adjacent to, but not part of the McClusky Canal chain of lakes. High numbers of smaller walleye will provide high catch rates.

Garrison Diversion Lakes (New Johns, Heckers, East Park and West Park) – Walleye abundance has declined in recent years, but large fish are still present. Strong year-classes in recent years should result in improved fishing over the next several years.

South Hoffer (Sheridan County) – Fair number of walleye, with some nice fish available.

Holmes Lake (McLean County) – Adjacent to, but not part of the McClusky Canal chain of lakes, abundance of smaller walleye.

Lake Metigoshe (Bottineau County) – Some nice walleye available.

Missouri River System – The Missouri River System continues to support good walleye populations. Lake Sakakawea holds most sizes of walleye, with many fish from 4-8 pounds. This summer, anglers should see lots of fish from the 2001 and 2003 year-classes, which should be 14-18 inches. Walleye fishing has been good the last few years and that should continue in 2006, especially in the reservoir's middle to lower portions.

The recent expansion of gizzard shad in the Missouri River and Lake Oahe has meant better walleye growth and survival, and most fish caught will likely be in the 15- to 20-inch range.

CATFISH

Garrison Dam Tailrace – Provides some good fishing for smaller catfish, especially in summer. Mouths of tributaries may produce bigger fish.

Lake Oahe – In the most recent netting survey, catfish were the most abundant fish species in Oahe, most averaging about 2 pounds.

Lake Sakakawea – Good numbers of cats throughout the reservoir, but best numbers and fishing success in upper end.

PANFISH (Yellow Perch, Crappie, Bluegill)

Arroda Lakes (Oliver County) – Fair crappie numbers, with some quality fish available.

Audubon (McLean County) – Periodically provides decent winter fishing for nice-sized perch.

Garrison Diversion Lakes (New Johns, Heckers, East Park and West Park) – Lots of small- to medium-sized yellow perch. Bluegill numbers have increased throughout the McClusky Canal chain, but most are small. Nice-sized crappie are occasionally caught.

Lake Metigoshe (Bottineau County) – Holds several sizes of bluegill, including some slabs, along with some nice crappie.

Nelson Lake (Oliver County) – Abundant quality-sized bluegill and crappie.

Round Lake (McHenry County) – Good numbers of small perch. Fishing should improve over the next several years as recent year-classes mature.

Strawberry Lake (McLean County) – Lots of small perch and bluegill.

SALMON

Missouri River System – Current water levels have affected the salmon fishery in Lake Sakakawea. During the current drought, coldwater habitat and rainbow smelt – the salmon's main food source – have been reduced. Because of this, salmon abundance and size will be reduced in 2006. However, there should be salmon available for anglers and stocking will continue as long as eggs are available.

WHITE BASS

Missouri River System – Lakes Sakakawea and Oahe hold good numbers of fish up to 15 inches, although Oahe has more white bass.

BASS (Largemouth, Smallmouth)

The Department strongly encourages catch-and-release fishing for bass, except in lakes where small fish may be overabundant.

Lake Audubon (McLean County) – A good population of smallmouth bass, with some large fish.

Garrison Diversion Lakes (New Johns, Heckers, East Park and West Park) – Excellent smallmouth bass fisheries, with many fish up to 18 inches. Largemouth bass in lower numbers, but many are in the 3- to 4-pound category.

Long Lake (Bottineau County) – Some largemouth bass in the 3-pound class.

Missouri River System – Lake Sakakawea has a very good smallmouth population, with many large fish caught in recent years. Many of those fish were 3-pounds-plus. Excellent reproduction the last decade gives Sakakawea's smallmouth fishery a bright future.

Nelson Lake (Oliver County) – Hands down the best largemouth bass lake in the state. Open water year-round allows fish to grow better than in other lakes. The current state record fish – 8 pounds, 7 1/2 ounces – was taken here in 1983.

Riverdale Spillway Pond (McLean County) – Decent smallmouth bass fishery, with some large fish.

TROUT

Custer Mine Pond (McLean County) – A good put-and-take fishery in a small, easy-to-fish pond.

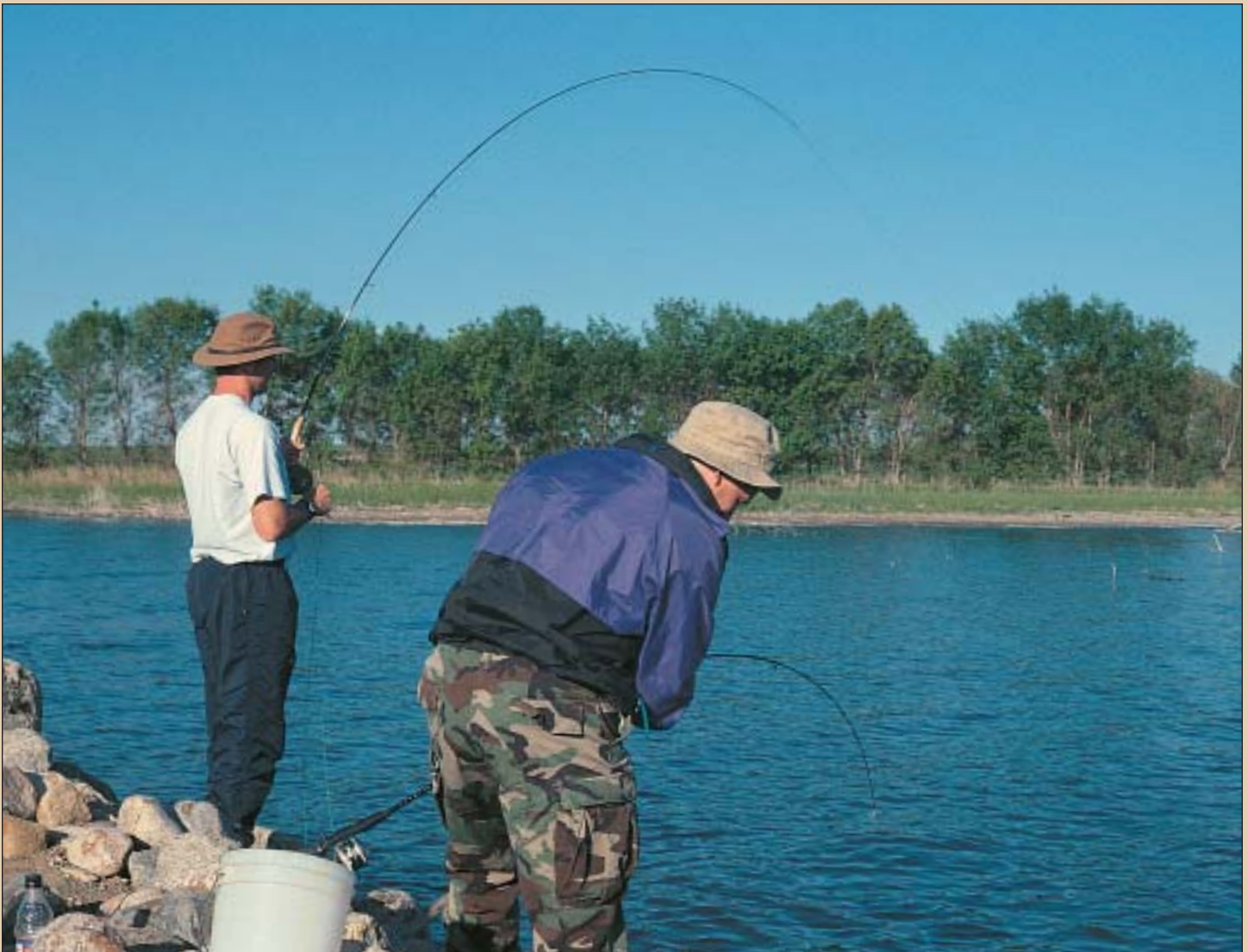
Lightning Lake (McLean County) – A quality trout fishery, with trout up to 25 inches.

Missouri River System – Lake trout were stocked in Lake Sakakawea from 1997-99 and anglers have been catching them recently. Last summer, lake trout were reported to be 5-6 pounds. Anglers are encouraged to release lakers until the population becomes established.

The quality trout fishery from Garrison Dam Tailrace and downstream continues to produce many large trout. Cutthroat trout were first introduced in 1999, with very good results. Brown and cutthroat trout have been stocked in alternating years in the Tailrace.

Strawberry Lake (Bottineau County) – Strawberry produces keeper fish by mid-summer.

Velva Sportsmen's Pond (Ward County) – Consistently a quality fishery for nice-sized browns and rainbows.



No matter the kind of equipment you employ, a day spent outdoors fishing is a good day.



NORTHEASTERN DISTRICT

Randy Hiltner, district fisheries supervisor, Devils Lake.

High water levels continue in most northeastern lakes and reservoirs. Thanks to mild winter conditions, fish in those waters were expected to avoid winterkill.

Devils Lake water levels have stabilized somewhat the past several years, with much of the runoff flowing through to Stump Lake, which has risen dramatically.

Generally, water conditions are good in the northeastern district and fish populations should thrive in most waters.

NORTHERN PIKE

Armourdale Dam (Towner County) – Good for small to average pike.

Bylin Dam (Walsh County) – Good pike numbers, with most fish less than 5 pounds.

Carpenter Lake (Rolette County) – A pretty consistent pike fishery.

Devils Lake – Devils Lake water levels have remained relatively high, with the lake still in excess of 100,000 acres. Pike habitat is still good, especially in the upper regions of the lake.

As has been the case since the mid-1990s, there will be great pike fishing opportunities in 2006. Pike averaged more than 4 pounds in 2005 netting surveys, so most are nice-sized and put up a good fight. Boat anglers can expect good results when casting crankbaits and similar lures. Excellent pike fishing can also be had from shore in late April through June by fishing with lures and

smelt along highways 19 and 281, as well as other roadways and the city dike. Pike are also often caught incidentally with live bait by anglers fishing for walleye or white bass.

Goose Lake (Wells County) – An emerging pike fishery.

Island Lake (Rolette County) – Excellent pike fishery, with some bigger fish.

Larimore Dam (Grand Forks County) – Nice average-sized pike.

Lake Laretta (Nelson County) – Has an excellent pike population, with fish of more than 5 pounds.

Matejcek Dam (Walsh County) – Good for some big pike.

Red Willow Lake (Griggs County) – Continues to provide good pike fishing. Anglers may not take northern pike of less than 24 inches.

School Section Lake (Rolette County) – An excellent pike fishery, but fishing is not always fast and furious.

Sibley Lake (Griggs County) – Lots of pike of more than 5 pounds. Poor summer access.

Silver Lake (Benson County) – Continues to produce nice northerns. Anglers are reminded to check with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for specific dates the lake is open to fishing.

Sweetwater Lake/Morrison Lake (Ramsey County) – With mild winters and high water, anglers continue to do well on these two lakes. Primarily a winter fishery.

WALLEYE

Bisbee Dam (Towner County) – Continues to produce nice-sized walleye.

Devils Lake – Devils Lake continues to support a good walleye population, with many small- to medium-sized fish. Strong year-classes are coming up, with most fish less than 20 inches. The walleye fishing was excellent last spring and summer.

Walleye population continues to thrive with significant natural reproduction. Walleye fishing opportunities will extend into the future. Devils Lake is a main destination for walleye anglers as the lake received heavy fishing pressure last spring and summer.

Eastern North Dakota's small lakes and reservoirs hold fair walleye populations. Water conditions should be good in the northeast with average rainfall. Because most of these waters are stocked regularly, catch-and-release fishing is encouraged to help maintain a quality, long-term fishery.

Matejcek Dam (Walsh County) – Has been providing walleye the past several years.

McVile Dam (Nelson County) – A small reservoir, with some nice-sized walleye.

South Golden Lake (Steele County) – Netting surveys show there are nice walleye in the lake.

Stump Lake (Nelson County) – Good population of walleye, most of which are less than 18 inches.

Tobiason Lake (Steele County) – A good population of nice walleye.

CATFISH

Red River – Catfishing is excellent over the length of the river. Catfish population is stable in northern reaches and the southern stretch holds more, but smaller fish. The area from Drayton to Pembina produces lots of trophy fish. Red River (and Bois de Sioux) anglers may take no more than one channel catfish daily greater than 24 inches long.

PANFISH (Yellow Perch, Crappie, Bluegill)

The region's many smaller lakes provide some excellent panfishing. Yellow perch, bluegill and crappie are among the more popular panfish. Some waters, such as Devils Lake, produce large perch. Other new lakes, many of them just big sloughs created by overflow from other waters, have strong perch populations and are providing angling opportunities.

There are fewer and fewer good perch fisheries in the new lakes as water levels decline or remain steady.

Good bluegill and crappie lakes are rarer than perch lakes. Some waters may have lots of small bluegill and crappie, but few have lots of big fish.

Armourdale Dam (Towner County) – Several size-classes of perch available.

Devils Lake – Perch densities in Devils Lake have declined the past several years because of limited spawning success. The population structure primarily contains fish hatched in 2001, so most are nice-sized (about 1 pound). Perch fishing has been relatively slow the past two winters and will likely remain that way until there is a strong hatch and several years of growth.

Dion Lake (Rolette County) – Can provide good perch action.

Goose Lake (Wells County) – Some nice perch.

Homme Dam (Walsh County) – Contains a decent crappie and yellow perch population, with some nice fish.

Larimore Dam (Grand Forks County) – A variety of panfish to keep kids happy.

McVile Dam (Nelson County) – Lots of small perch and bluegill.

Red Willow Lake (Griggs County) – This small lake has some good-sized bluegill.

South Golden Lake (Steele County) – Some perch available.

Stump Lake (Nelson County) – Holds some big perch, but population densities are much lower than several years ago.

WHITE BASS

Devils Lake – Although white bass densities are down with high lake levels, the lake still holds good numbers of 2-pound plus fish that are more appreciated each year for sporting and eating quality. Best times to catch them are late May and early June, although good fishing is possible anytime there is open water.

BASS (Largemouth, Smallmouth)

Homme Dam (Walsh County) – Decent largemouth bass fishery, with some big fish.

Larimore Dam (Grand Forks County) – Holds several sizes of largemouth bass. Catch-and-release is recommended.

McVile Dam (Nelson County) – A small reservoir, with some nice bass.

TROUT

Hooker Lake (Rolette County) – A good rainbow population, with catchable-size fish.

Turtle River (Grand Forks County) – Game and Fish continues stocking catchable-size trout in spring and fall in Turtle River State Park.

SOUTHWESTERN DISTRICT

Emil Berard, district fisheries supervisor, Dickinson.

Southwestern North Dakota has been in the grip of a dry cycle for four years. Lakes and fish came through in fair shape last year because of spring rains, which helped to maintain some lake water levels.

Overall, water levels in the southwest are still not ideal, with many lakes down 2-8 feet from full pool.



RON WILSON



NORTHERN PIKE

Blickensderfer Dam (Hettinger County) – A fair population of pike that average 3 pounds.

Bowman-Haley (Bowman County) – A fair spring fishery for smaller pike, but very dependent on water levels.

Cannonball, Heart, and Grand rivers and Cedar Creek – Good spring fisheries for pike, especially downstream from lowhead diversion structures.

Cedar Lake (Slope County) – Has suffered partial winterkill, but still produces some pike of 8-10 pounds.

Danzig Dam (Morton County) – Limited numbers of pike, with some over 15 pounds.

Heart Butte Reservoir (Lake Tschida) (Grant County) – Continues to have a limited fishery for pike up to 15 pounds.

Odland Dam (Golden Valley County) – Holds a strong population of pike, with most fish less than 10 pounds.

Patterson Lake (Stark County) – Limited fishery in spring for pike of 4-8 pounds.

Spring Lake (Bowman County) – Good numbers of small pike.

WALLEYE

Walleye are doing fair in larger, deeper waters such as Lake Tschida (Heart Butte), Patterson Lake and Bowman-Haley Dam, although fisheries have declined due to lower water levels. Smaller lakes also provide some walleye fishing. Anglers are encouraged to release walleye in smaller lakes because they can be fished out easily.

Indian Creek Dam (Hettinger County) – A good walleye lake, with a mixture of age- and size-classes.

Patterson Lake (Stark County) – A limited fishery due to drawdown for construction.

Sheep Creek Dam (Grant County) – Good numbers of smaller fish.

An angler gets an early jump on the 2006 open water fishing season downstream of Garrison Dam on the Missouri River.

CATFISH

Heart Butte Reservoir (Lake Tschida) (Grant County) – A fairly good fishery, with many Whopper catfish. This fishery extends up the Heart River to Patterson Lake.

Little Missouri River – Fish kill occurred in summer 2002, but good catfishing can be found in the river upstream to Medora. Fish migrate even farther upstream when flows are high.

PANFISH (Yellow Perch, Crappie, Bluegill)

Daily and possession limits have been changed statewide for perch, white bass, crappie, and bluegill. The daily limit is now 20 and possession limit is 80, except for Odland Dam where daily limit is 10 and possession limit is 20.

Bowman-Haley Reservoir (Bowman County) – A limited fishery for large bluegill and yellow perch.

Danzig Dam (Morton County) – Limited numbers of larger perch and bluegill.

Davis Dam (Slope County) – Many small bluegill, but good overall population.

Dickinson Dike (Stark County) – Fair number of quality bluegill.

Heart Butte Dam (Lake Tschida) (Grant County) – Improved fishery for quality-sized perch, crappie and white bass.

Indian Creek (Hettinger County) – Fair numbers of larger bluegill. Some larger perch also showing up during winter.

Mirror Lake (Adams County) – Good populations of quality crappie and bluegill.

Odland Dam (Golden Valley County) – Good numbers of large bluegill and yellow perch (daily limit 10 and possession limit is 20).

Patterson Lake (Stark County) – A limited, though improving, fishery for quality-sized crappie. Some nice bluegill and perch also caught in winter.

Raleigh Reservoir (Grant County) – Fair bluegill population and some larger perch also showing up in winter.

Sheep Creek Dam (Grant County) – Excellent bluegill and crappie populations, with fish averaging 1/4 pound. Anglers reported good success in 2005, with at least some fish of more than 1 pound.

WHITE BASS

Heart Butte Reservoir (Lake Tschida) (Grant County) – White bass population is expanding slowly, but those caught are quality fish.

BASS (Largemouth, Smallmouth)

Belfield Dam (Stark County) – A fair largemouth population, but fish generally less than 1 pound. Catch-and-release is encouraged.

Davis Dam (Slope County) – A fair largemouth population, with a few fish up to 4 pounds. Catch-and-release is encouraged.

Camels Hump Dam (Golden Valley County) – A limited population of adult bass due to lake restoration efforts.

Heart Butte Reservoir (Lake Tschida) (Grant County) – Although smallmouth bass are not common, they are usually large. The tailrace below the dam occasionally attracts good numbers of smallmouth.

Indian Creek Dam (Hettinger County) – Low density smallmouth population, but some nice fish. The lake also has fair numbers of largemouth bass.

Raleigh Reservoir (Grant County) – Boasts a good largemouth bass population with fish averaging 2 pounds. A limited number of smaller-sized smallmouth bass available.

Sheep Creek Dam (Grant County) – A fair, young population of largemouth and smallmouth bass.

TROUT

Belfield Dam (Billings County) – Limited population of smaller rainbow trout because of drought conditions.

Camels Hump Dam (Golden Valley County) – A newly-stocked lake where rainbow and brown trout prospects are limited because of drought conditions, construction and lake restoration efforts.

Davis Dam (Slope County) – Trout fishing should be fair this year.

Dickinson Dike (Slope County) – Excellent trout fishery maintained for youth angling.

North Lemmon Lake (Adams County) – Very good rainbow trout lake, with a few nice browns. Angling can be difficult because of drought conditions.

Raleigh Reservoir (Grant County) – Good for rainbow trout that average 1 pound.

Sheep Creek Dam (Grant County) – Good for smaller rainbow trout.



SOUTH CENTRAL DISTRICT

*Jason Lee, district fisheries supervisor,
Bismarck.*

Water levels have receded in some areas, especially the southern half of the district. Some of the opportunistic perch/pike lakes (temporary lakes created by high water) from several years ago are down 3-6 feet. However, in the northern part of the district and parts of the south, conditions are much better.

The potential for winterkill was low for the district due to minimal snow accumulation in most areas.

A boat is not always necessary to get to where the walleye are biting on the Missouri River.



CHRIS GRONDAHL

NORTHERN PIKE

Alkaline Lake (Kidder County) – Good numbers of pike exceeding 5 pounds.

Beaver Lake (Logan County) – Decent number of pike, but many are small.

Cherry Lake (Kidder County) – Pike are fairly abundant, but most fish are not large.

Dry Lake (McIntosh County) – Pike are not as abundant as in previous years, but an excellent population still exists.

Frohlich Dam (Sioux) – Fair number of pike, many under 5 pounds.

Green Lake (McIntosh County) – Decent number of pike, with a fair number of larger fish.

Horsehead Lake (Kidder) – Abundant pike.

West Lake Napoleon Complex (Logan County) – Decent pike numbers.

Round Lake (Kidder) – Good numbers of pike, with some fish of more than 7 pounds.

Rice Lake (Emmons County) – Good numbers of pike of less than 5 pounds.

WALLEYE

Walleye populations in the south central district are good on some larger lakes. Even though some areas in the district were dry

last year, water levels remained fairly consistent in larger waters.

Alkaline Lake (Kidder County) – Walleye population continues to expand, however, most are young, small fish.

Dry Lake (McIntosh County) – Good walleye population and size range.

Green Lake (McIntosh County) – Good walleye population, with a wide range of sizes.

Lake Josephine (Kidder County) – Good numbers of smaller walleye, with some larger fish.

Rice Lake (Emmons County) – Good walleye population, with some fish longer than 20 inches.

Round Lake (Kidder County) – Excellent walleye population, with good size structure.

Sweet Briar Dam (Morton County) – Walleye population had decreased in recent years. The reservoir was drawn down approximately 6 feet in 2005 because of safety concerns with the dam. Hopefully, repairs can be made to alleviate concerns with the dam so this popular fishery can be refilled and provide the quality fishing it has in the past.

PANFISH (Yellow Perch, Crappie, Bluegill)

Crown Butte Dam (Morton County) – Crown Butte was chemically renovated in fall 2005. The current water elevation is down approximately 11 feet. Largemouth bass, bluegill, and trout will be restocked after water levels rebound.

Dry Lake (McIntosh County) – Decent numbers of medium- to large-sized perch.

Fish Creek Dam (Morton County) – Decent population of quality-sized crappie.

Jasper Lake (Kidder County) – Good numbers and size range of perch.

Rice Lake (Emmons County) – Perch abundance has decreased during the last few years as the walleye population increased.

Round Lake (Kidder County) – Abundant smaller perch.

Sweet Briar Dam (Morton County) – Fair population of quality-sized bluegill.

BASS (Largemouth, Smallmouth)

Fish Creek Dam (Morton County) – Good numbers and sizes of both largemouth and smallmouth bass.

McDowell Dam (Burleigh County) – Fair numbers of larger largemouth bass.

Nygren Dam (Burleigh County) – Good numbers of largemouth bass, with some larger fish.

Sweet Briar Dam (Morton County) – Good population of quality-sized largemouth bass.

TROUT

Crown Butte Dam (Morton County) – Crown Butte Dam was chemically renovated in fall 2005. The current water elevation in the reservoir is down approximately 11 feet. Largemouth bass, bluegill, and trout will be restocked after water levels rebound.

Fish Creek Dam (Morton County) – Good numbers of both brown and rainbow trout, with carryover of larger-sized trout.

McDowell Dam (Burleigh County) – Frequent fish kills in summer limit carryover. McDowell is primarily a put-and-take fishery, providing a good trout fishery close to an urban area during early spring before water temperatures rise.

Nygren Dam (Morton County) – Good numbers of rainbow trout, with some larger carryover fish.

***PAT HEADRICK** is the Game and Fish Department's website editor.*

